



Written Testimony of Dr. Kyle C. Kopko
Executive Director, Center for Rural Pennsylvania
Pennsylvania Senate Transportation Committee
May 28, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Ward, Senator Flynn, and the members of the Pennsylvania Senate Transportation Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Dr. Kyle C. Kopko, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania.

As you know, the Center is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative research agency of the General Assembly. The Center's legislative mandates include two broad charges: 1) conducting and sponsoring applied policy research to benefit our rural communities; and 2) maintaining a comprehensive database of statistical indicators to assist policymakers in meeting the needs of rural Pennsylvania. I will use information from one of our funded external research projects and from this database to discuss a variety of population and demographic trends, and transportation-related indicators, primarily in relation to our rural communities. It is my hope that these data will be useful to the Committee as it considers strategies to support the transportation needs in our rural communities.

Along with this written testimony, I have submitted a series of data visualizations that may aid the work of the Committee. The data visualizations provide a greater level of detail and more information than I can present in this written statement. However, I wish to highlight several findings for the purpose of this written submission, and I will elaborate on these findings in greater detail as part of my verbal testimony:

1. Pennsylvania's population—in both rural and urban areas—is aging. This will likely create new demands and pressures to meet the transportation needs of the Commonwealth's residents.

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2. Rural counties face distinctive transportation challenges, such as fewer public transportation options, and a greater percentage of unpaved roads or deficient bridges.
3. As our population ages, especially within rural counties, there may be a greater need to access hospital and medical services. Based upon the latest available data, nearly 1.9 million Pennsylvanians live more than a 20-minute drive away from a hospital.

In addition to the above trends, I have also provided information regarding the findings of past and forthcoming Center-supported research reports. In 2023, the Center published a fact sheet titled “Transportation Grants: Measuring Rural and Urban Municipal Capacity.” This report surveyed 758 rural and urban municipal officials to better understand their ability to apply for state and federal transportation funding. For both rural and urban municipal officials, the inability to meet a grant match requirement or having the staff capacity or expertise to pursue competitive funding opportunities were identified as barriers to applying for competitive funding. I have included a copy of this fact sheet with my written testimony.

Furthermore, within the next two months, the Center will publish a research report detailing the proliferation and effects of warehousing in the Commonwealth. The research team that conducted this analysis was led by Dr. Moria Conway of Kutztown University of Pennsylvania. While the full report is currently in the copy-editing and formatting stage, I can share the general findings of the research. The forthcoming report indicates that between 2014 and 2023, the number of general warehouse establishments in Pennsylvania increased by 35 percent. In terms of rates of collisions involving commercial vehicles, the crash rate on state roads has remained relatively steady over time, but there is evidence of an increased number of collisions on local roads involving commercial vehicles. I have also included a map within the data visualization materials, denoting the net change in general warehousing and storage establishments in Pennsylvania between 2014 and 2023. As you will see, much of this growth has occurred along the I-81 and I-78 corridors.

I hope that this information is useful to members of the Committee. The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is happy to serve as a resource to any members of the General Assembly, and legislative staff, throughout the policymaking process. Please do not hesitate to contact my office if the Center can be of assistance at any time. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the Committee, and I welcome the opportunity to answer your questions.



A LEGISLATIVE AGENCY OF THE PENNSYLVANIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Rural Transportation

Senate Transportation Committee

May 28, 2025

Kyle Kopko, Ph.D., J.D.

Center for Rural Pennsylvania

www.rural.pa.gov



**Legislative research agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly
(Act 16, 1987 & Act 12, 2009)**

Center for Rural Pennsylvania

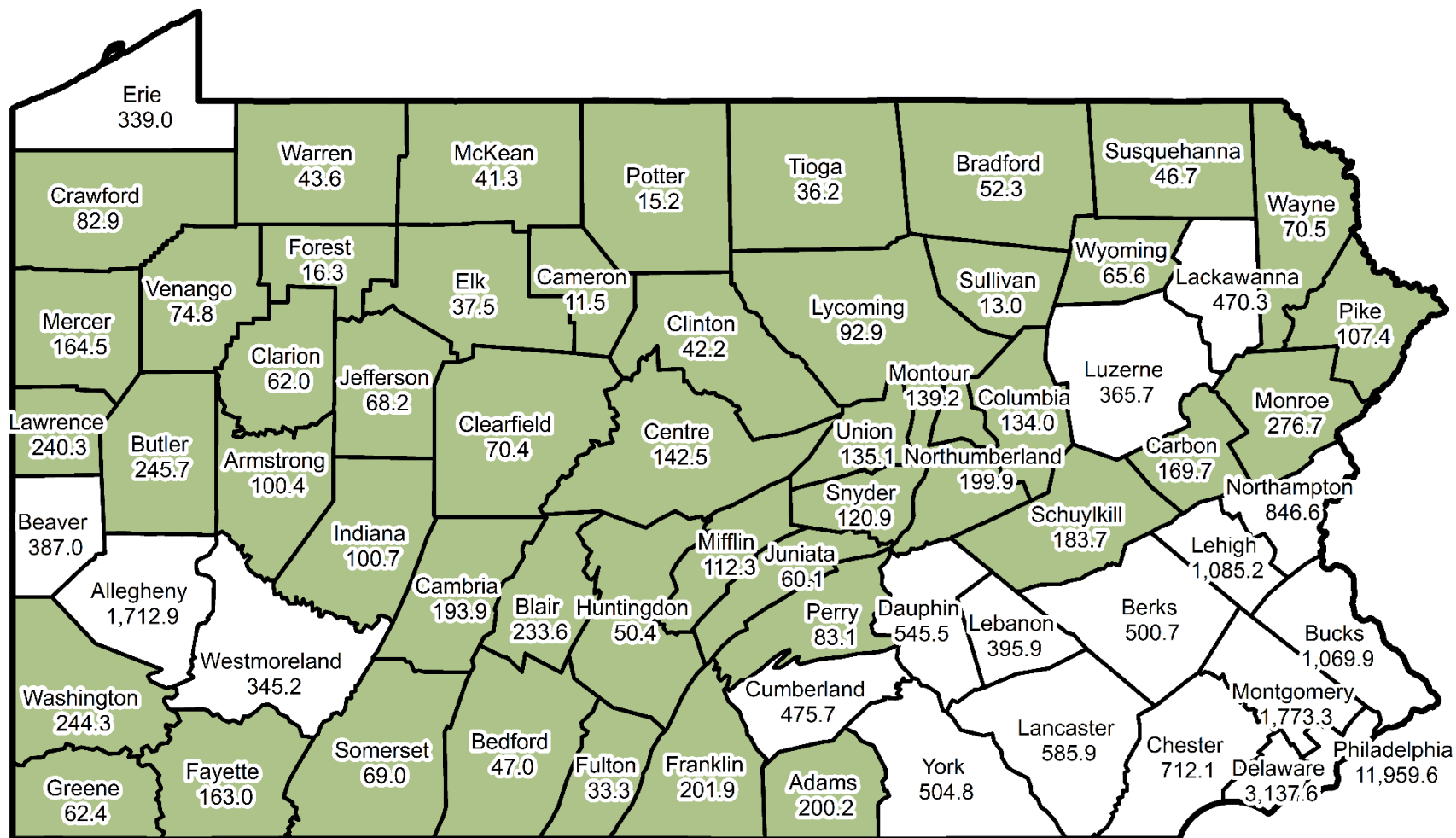
Mandates

- Administer grants to conduct research on rural conditions.
- Maintain a database on rural conditions and needs.

Recent Legislative Hearings:

Rural Hospital and Health Care Sustainability, Rural Population Change, Child Care Access in Rural Pennsylvania, Opioid and Substance Use Disorder Crisis in Pennsylvania, and Advancing Rural Mental Health Awareness and Support

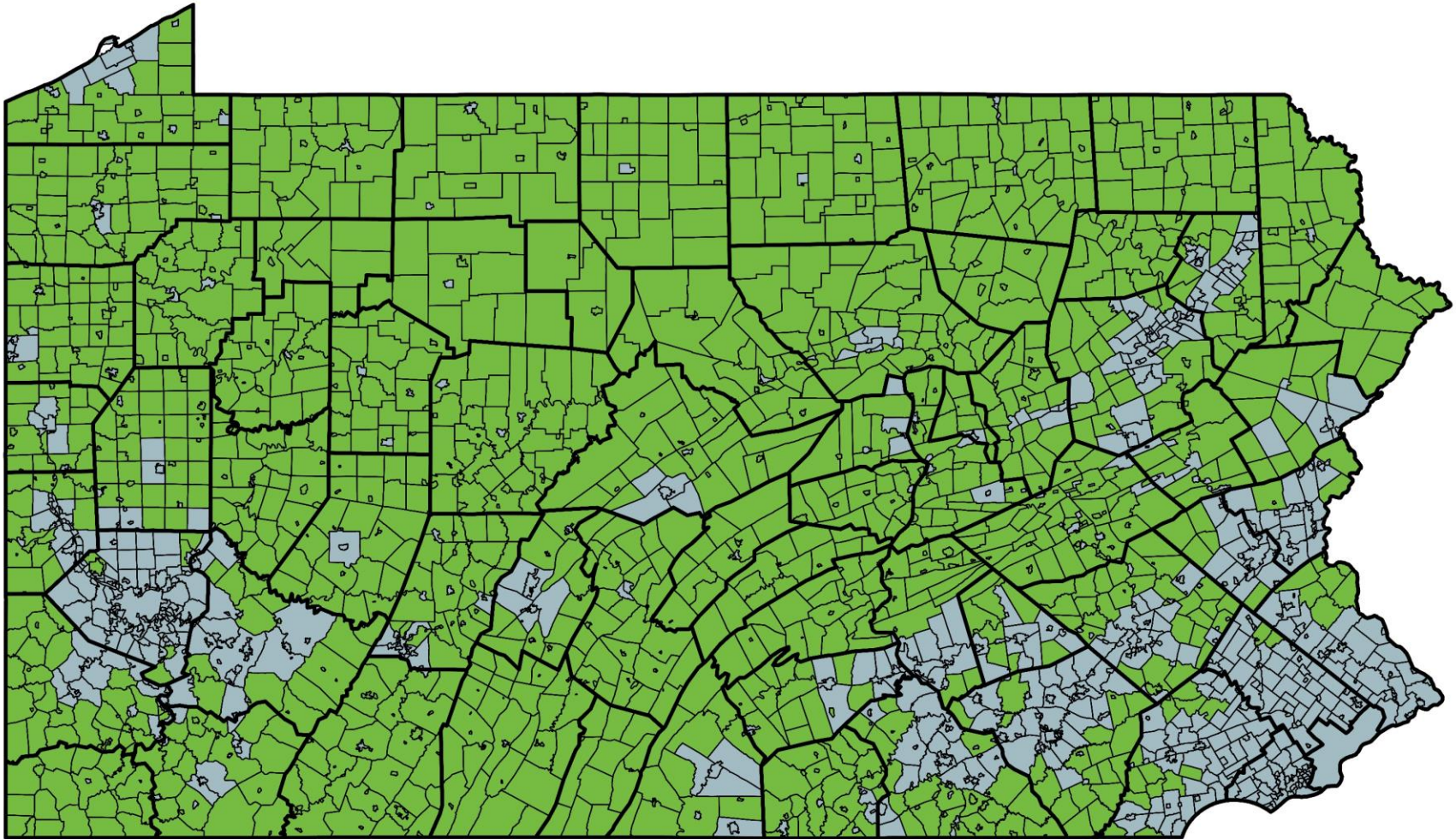
Pennsylvania Rural and Urban Counties, 2020



Statewide Population Density = 291 Persons per Square Land Mile, 2020

- 19 Urban Counties - Population Density At or Above Statewide Rate
- 48 Rural Counties - Population Density Below Statewide Rate

Pennsylvania Rural and Urban Municipalities, 2020



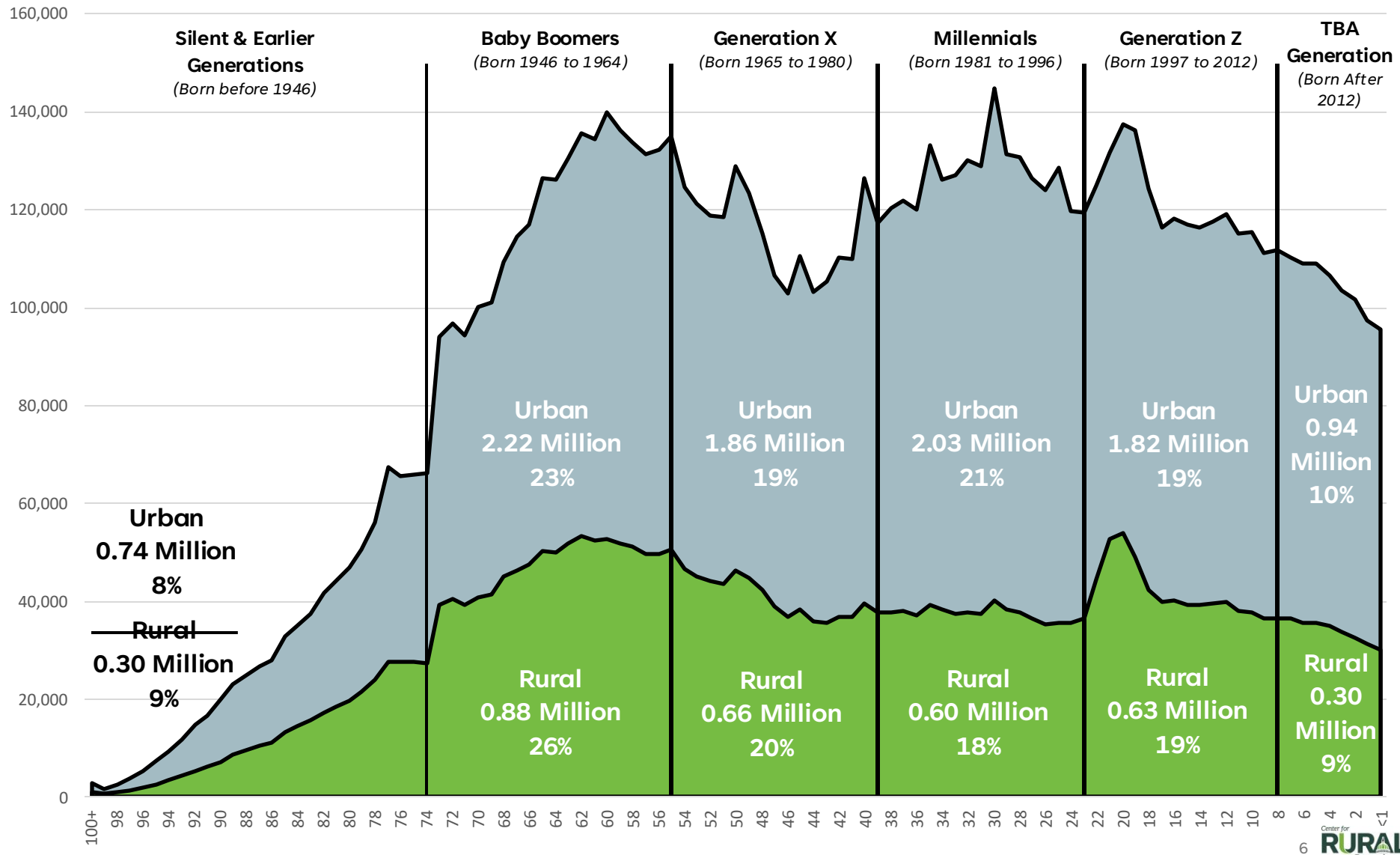
Statewide Population Density = 291 Persons per Square Land Mile, 2020

- Rural (1,594 Municipalities)
- Urban (978 Municipalities)

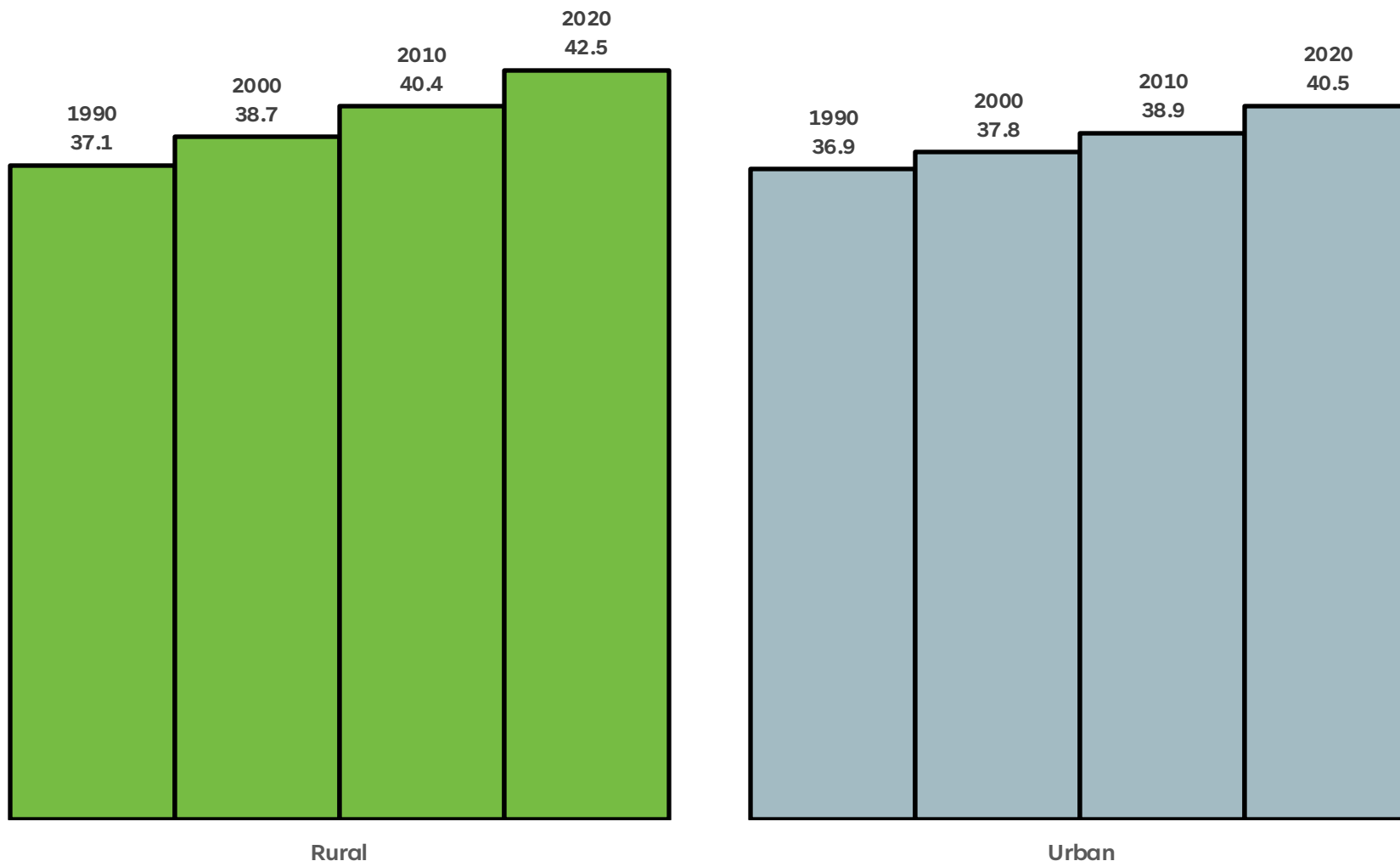
Pennsylvania is Becoming Older

Generational Cohorts in Rural and Urban Pennsylvania, 2020

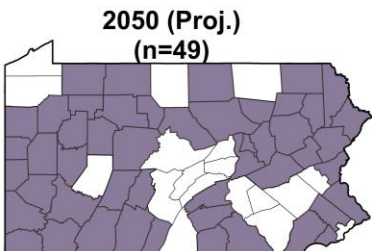
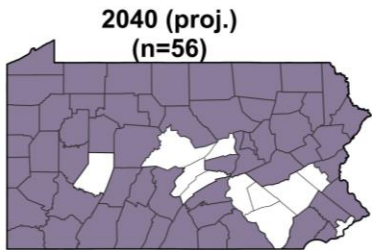
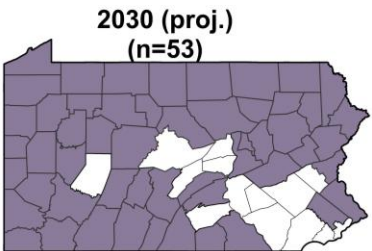
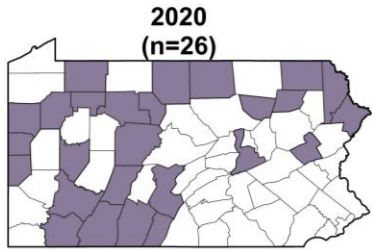
Data sources: 2020 Decennial Census, U.S. Census Bureau, and the Pew Research Center.



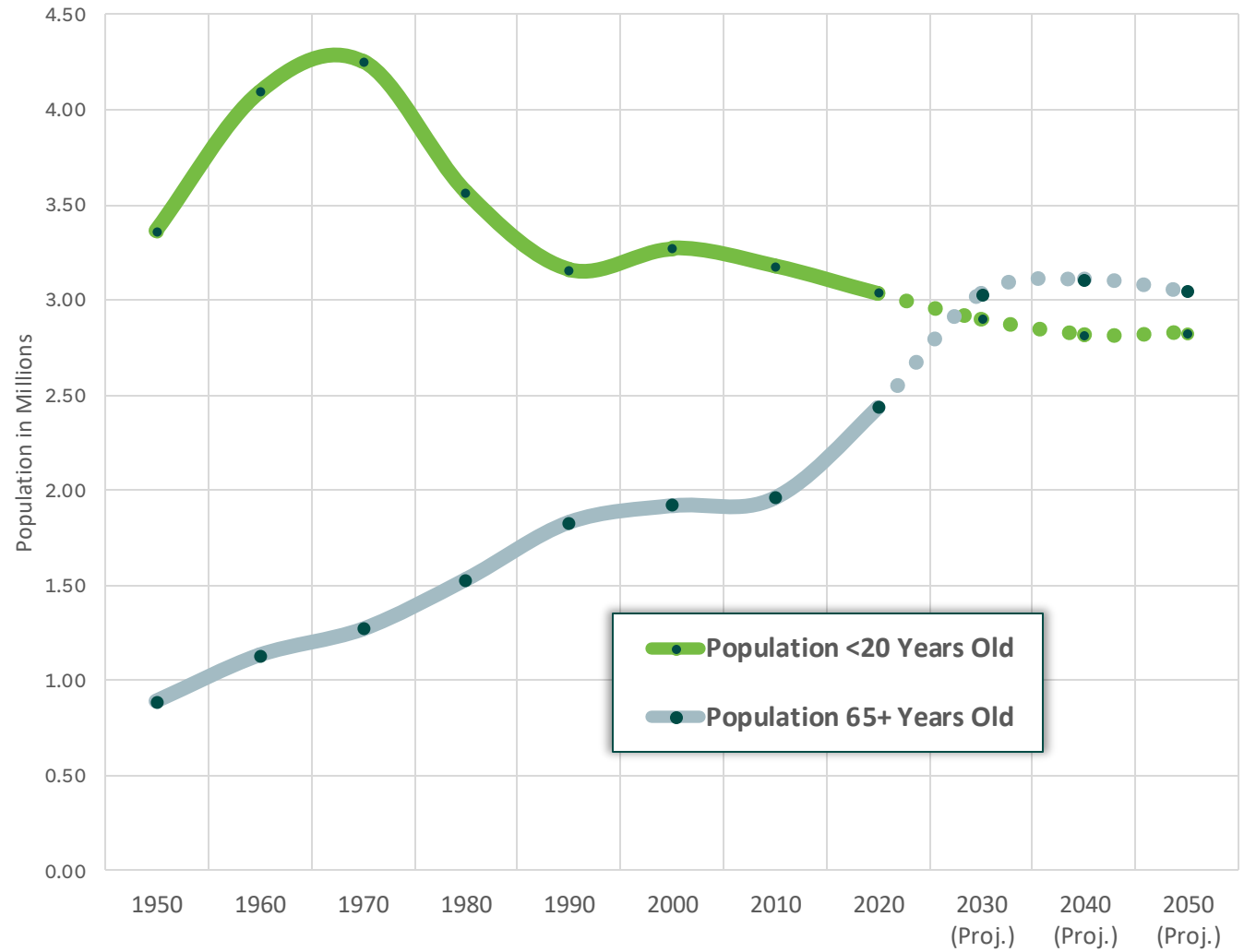
Average Age of Rural and Urban Pennsylvanians, 1990 to 2020



Shaded counties have
more people 65+ than
people <20 years old



Number of Youth and Senior Citizens in Pennsylvania, 1950 to 2050 (Projected)



Status of Transportation and Access

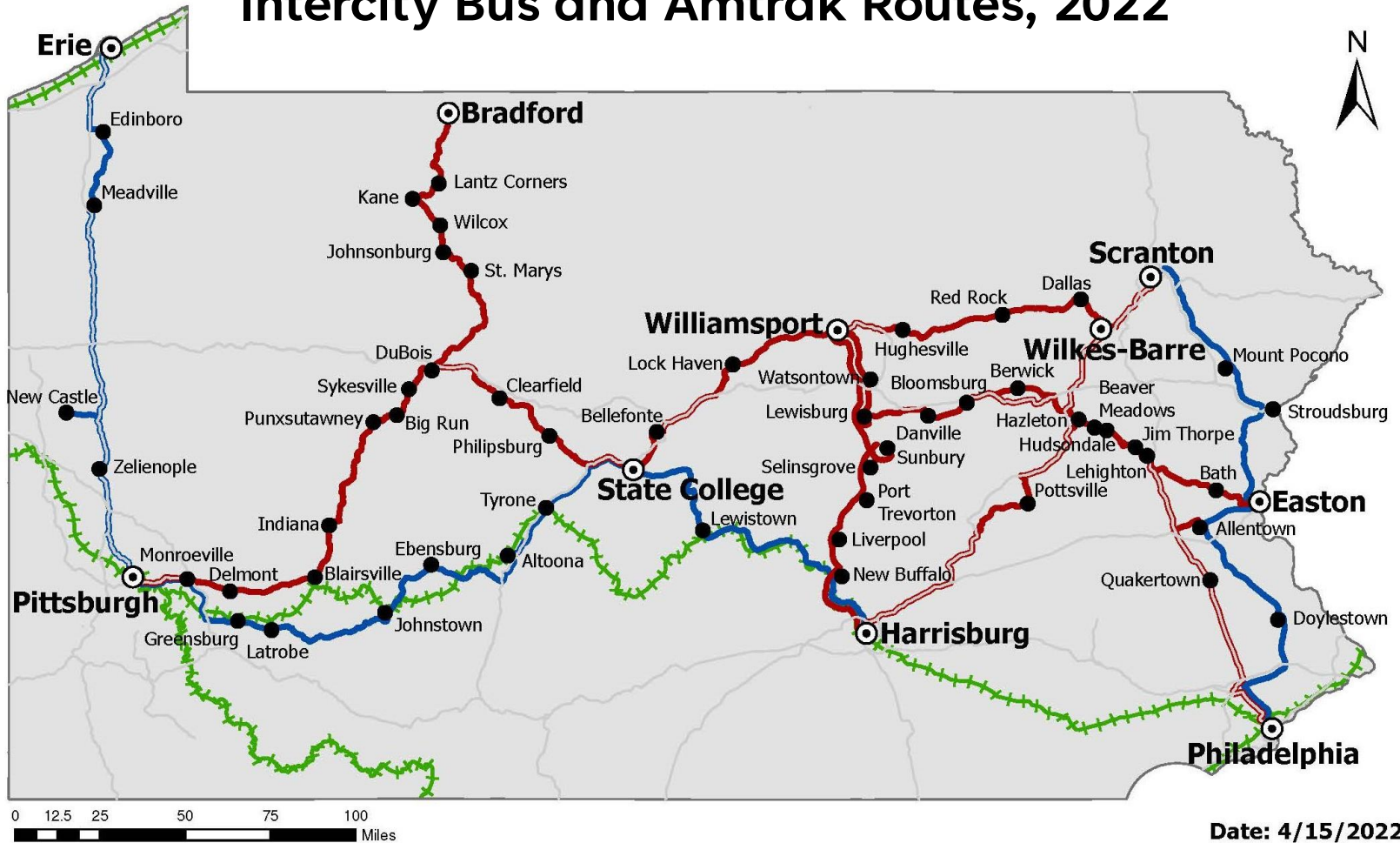
Pennsylvania, 2025

This map illustrates the projected transit agency service areas in Pennsylvania for the year 2025. The state is divided into numerous regions, each labeled with the name of the transit agency or a combination of agencies. The labels include: EMTA, CATA (Crawford), TAWC, ATA, BeST Transit, BeST Transit, COLTS, CATA (Crawford), SVSS/MCCT, NCATA, BTA, BCTA, PAAC, Freedom Transit, FACT, WCTA, IndiGo, CamTran, AMTRAN, CATA (Centre), River Valley Transit (RVT), River Valley Transit (RVT), BeST Transit, LCTA, MCTA, LANTA, LANTa, STS, SCTA, SEPTA, SEPTA/PART, SEPTA, rabbittransit, LT, and SACTA. The map uses a light beige background with black outlines for the agency boundaries. The text is in a bold, sans-serif font.

 No Fixed Route Services
 Fixed Route Services

10 Center for **RURAL** Pennsylvania

Intercity Bus and Amtrak Routes, 2022



Intercity Bus Routes

— Greyhound

— Fullington

- Pittsburgh - Erie
- Pittsburgh - Harrisburg
- Scranton - Philadelphia

- Pittsburgh - Bradford
- Pittsburgh - State College
- State College - Wilkes-Barre
- Scranton - Harrisburg

- Williamsport - Easton
- Williamsport - Harrisburg
- Williamsport - Philadelphia

⊙ Route Start/End

• Stop

— Primary Road

++ Amtrak Corridor

🚂 Amtrak Connection

How Do Pennsylvanians Get to Work?

Workers 16 years and over.



Car

Rural: 86%
Urban: 75%



Walk

Rural: 3%
Urban: 3%



Other Types of Transportation

Rural: 1%
Urban: 2%

Most Popular Mode of Public Transit

Bus

- Rural: 92%
- Urban: 62%

Rail

- Rural: 5%
- Urban: 33%

Other (i.e.,
Streetcar or
Ferryboat)

- Rural: 3%
- Urban: 4%



Public Transportation

Rural: 1%
Urban: 5%



Work from Home

Rural: 9%
Urban: 15%

Population Who May Be Dependent on Public Transportation



Has a Disability

Rural: 16%
Urban: 13%



Age 65+

Rural: 21%
Urban: 18%



Veteran

Rural: 8%
Urban: 6%



Public Health Insurance

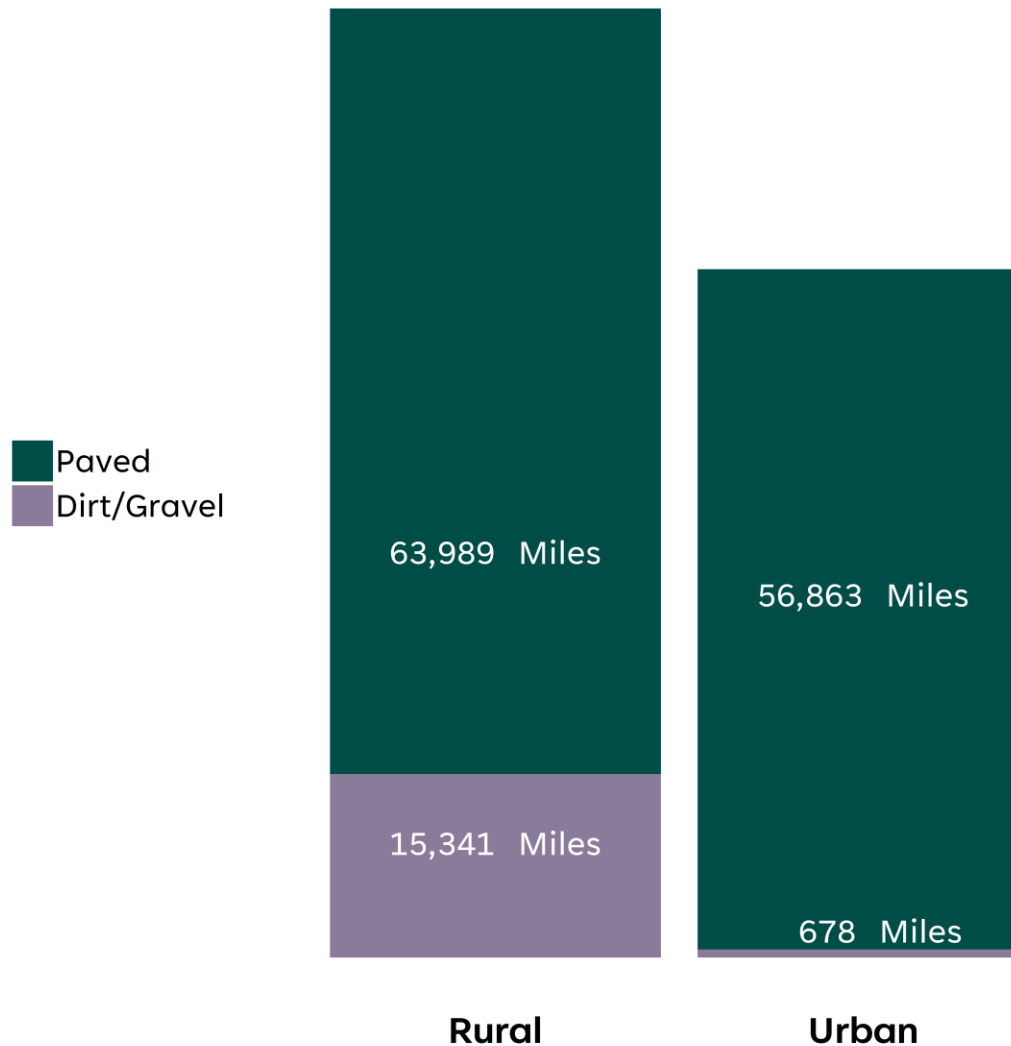
Rural: 21%
Urban: 20%



Household with No Vehicle

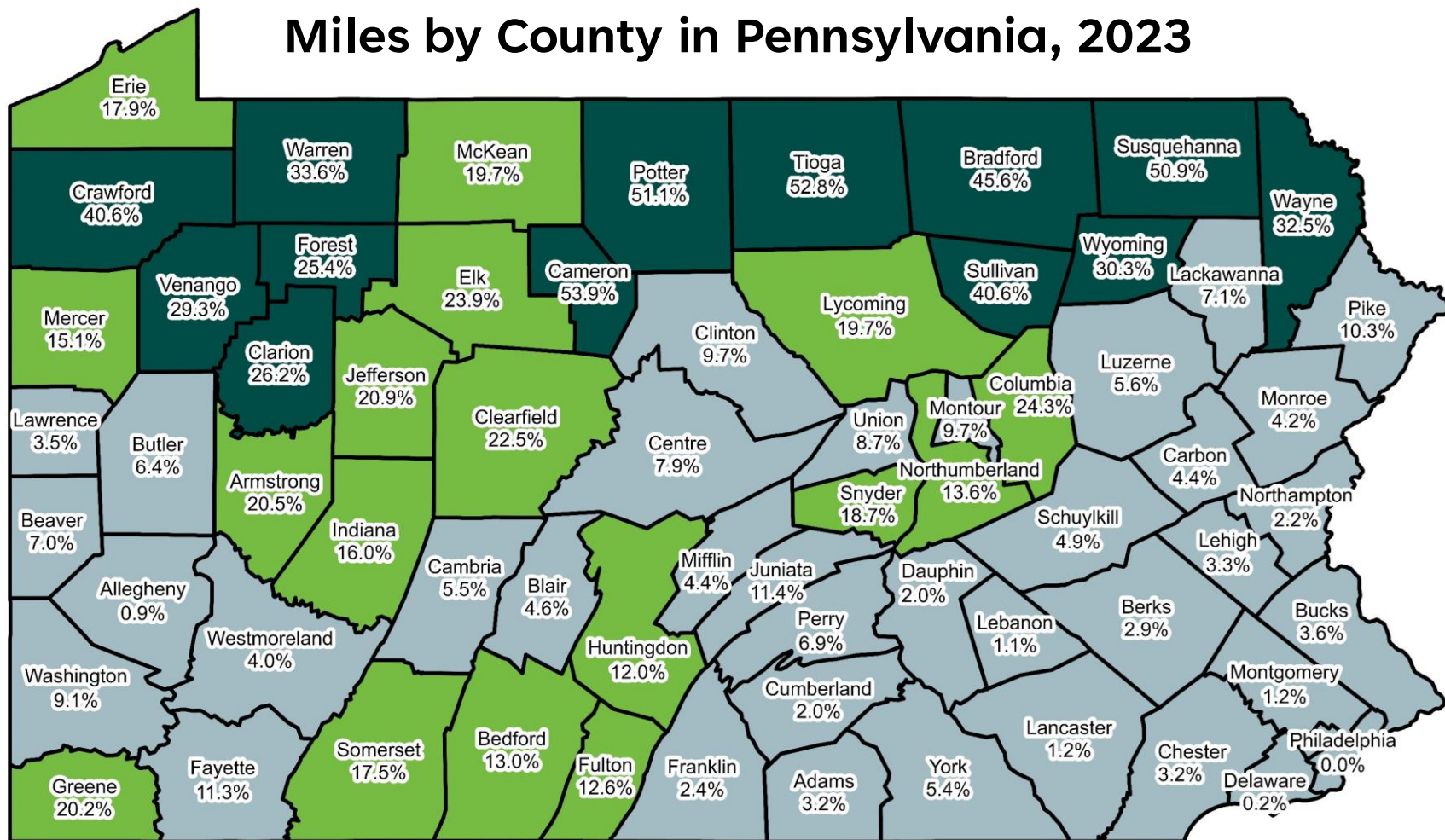
Rural: 7%
Urban: 11%

Total Road Miles by Pavement Presence and Rural/Urban Designation, 2023



Data source: Pennsylvania Department of Transportation Open Data.

Dirt/Gravel Roads as a Percent of Total Road Miles by County in Pennsylvania, 2023

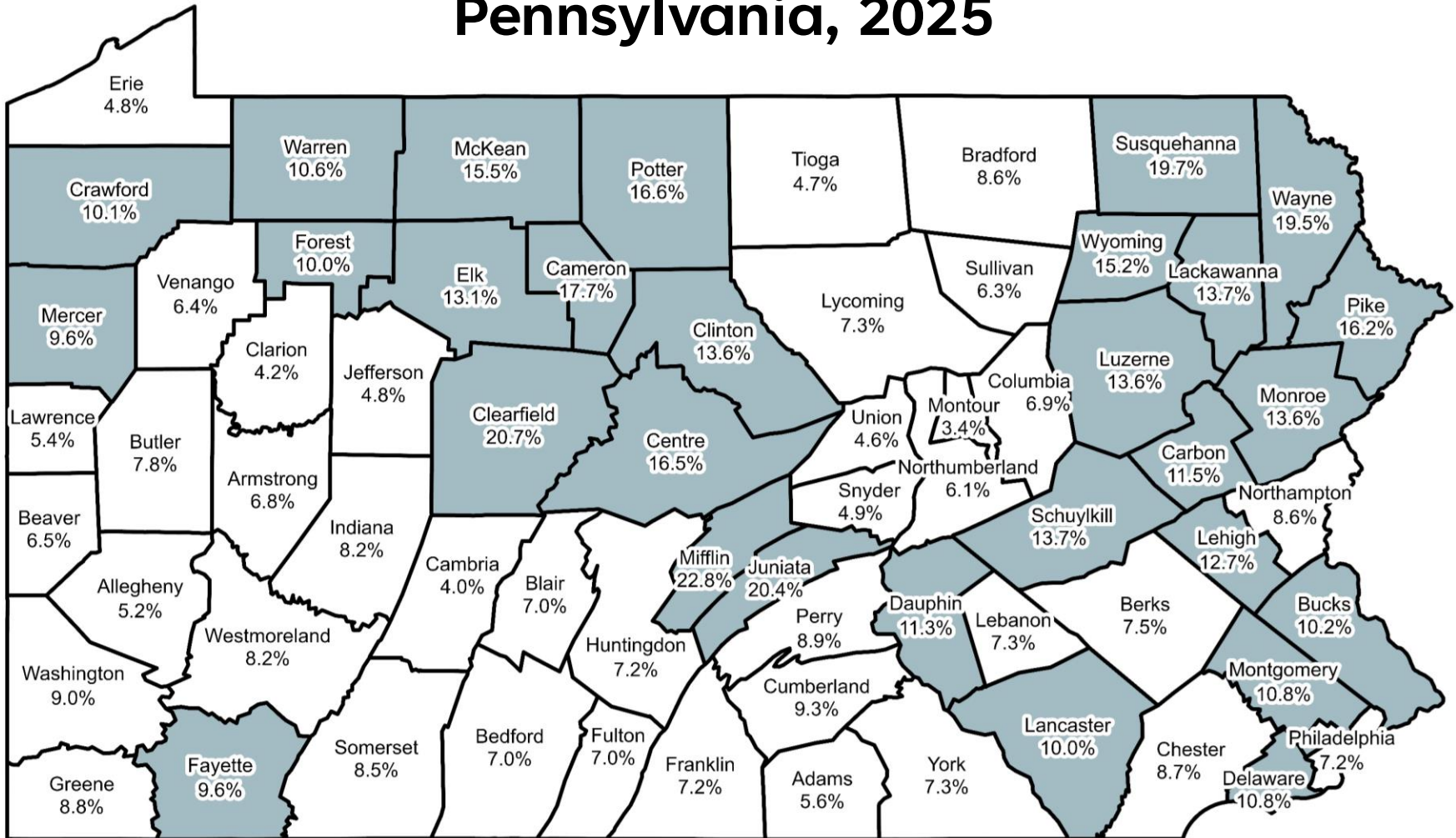


Statewide Total Miles of Dirt/Gravel Local Roads: 15,777

Statewide Percent of Dirt/Gravel Roads: 11.7%

- Less than Statewide Average (<11.7%)
- 11.7% to 24.9%
- 25.0%+

Percent of Bridges Rated as Poor by County in Pennsylvania, 2025

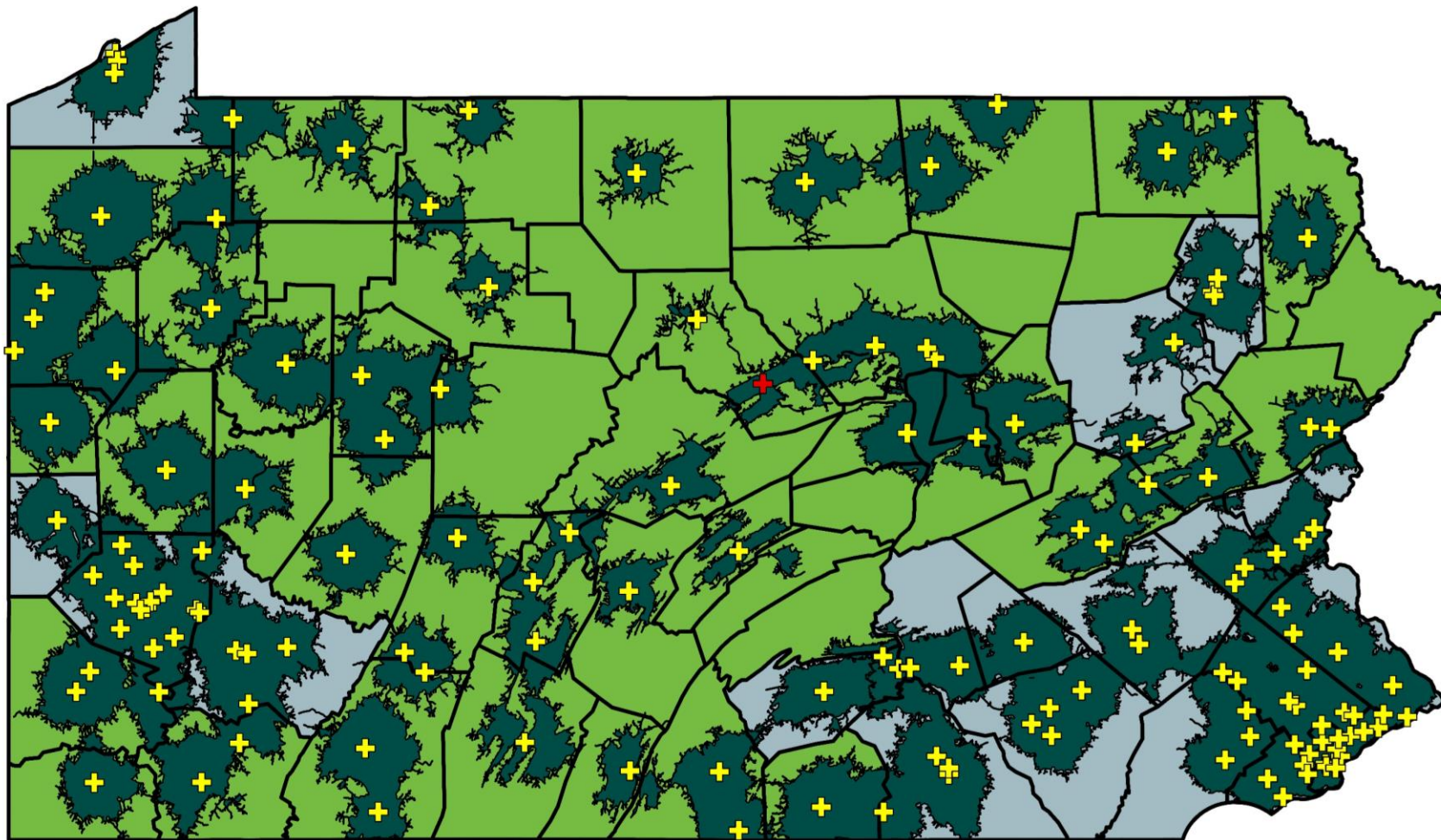


Statewide Rate = 9.6% of Bridges Were Rated as Poor

- Below Statewide Rate
- At or Above Statewide Rate

Note: Poor as previously referred to as “Structurally Deficient” and indicates that the bridge has deterioration to one or more of its major components. The data includes all open and posted bridges across all ownership types (state, local, and private).

20-Minute Drive Time to a Hospital, 2025



Population Located within a 20-minute drive to a Hospital = 11.1 million (~86%)

Population Located outside of a 20-minute drive to a Hospital = 1.87 million (~14%)

✚ General Acute Care Hospitals

✚ UPMC Lock Haven - Outpatient Emergency Room

■ Area Located within a 20-minute Drive Time to a Hospital

■ Rural

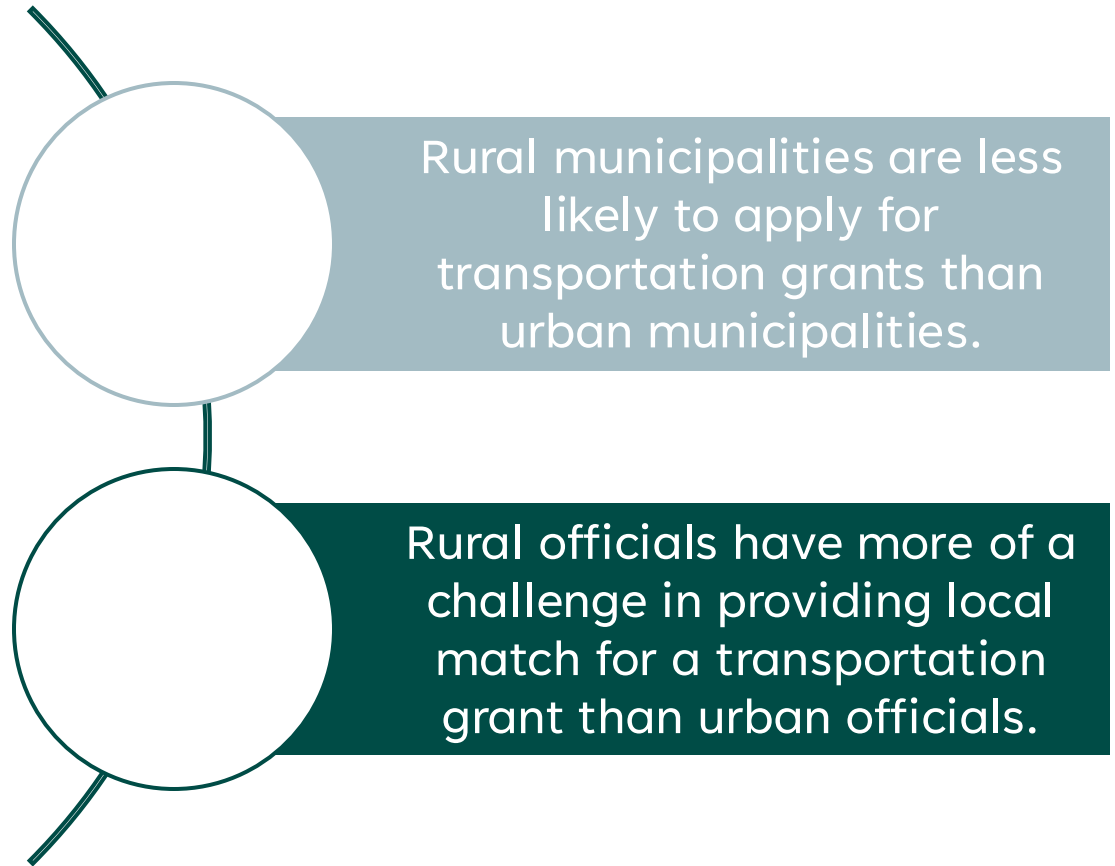
■ Urban

Highlights from Past and Forthcoming Research

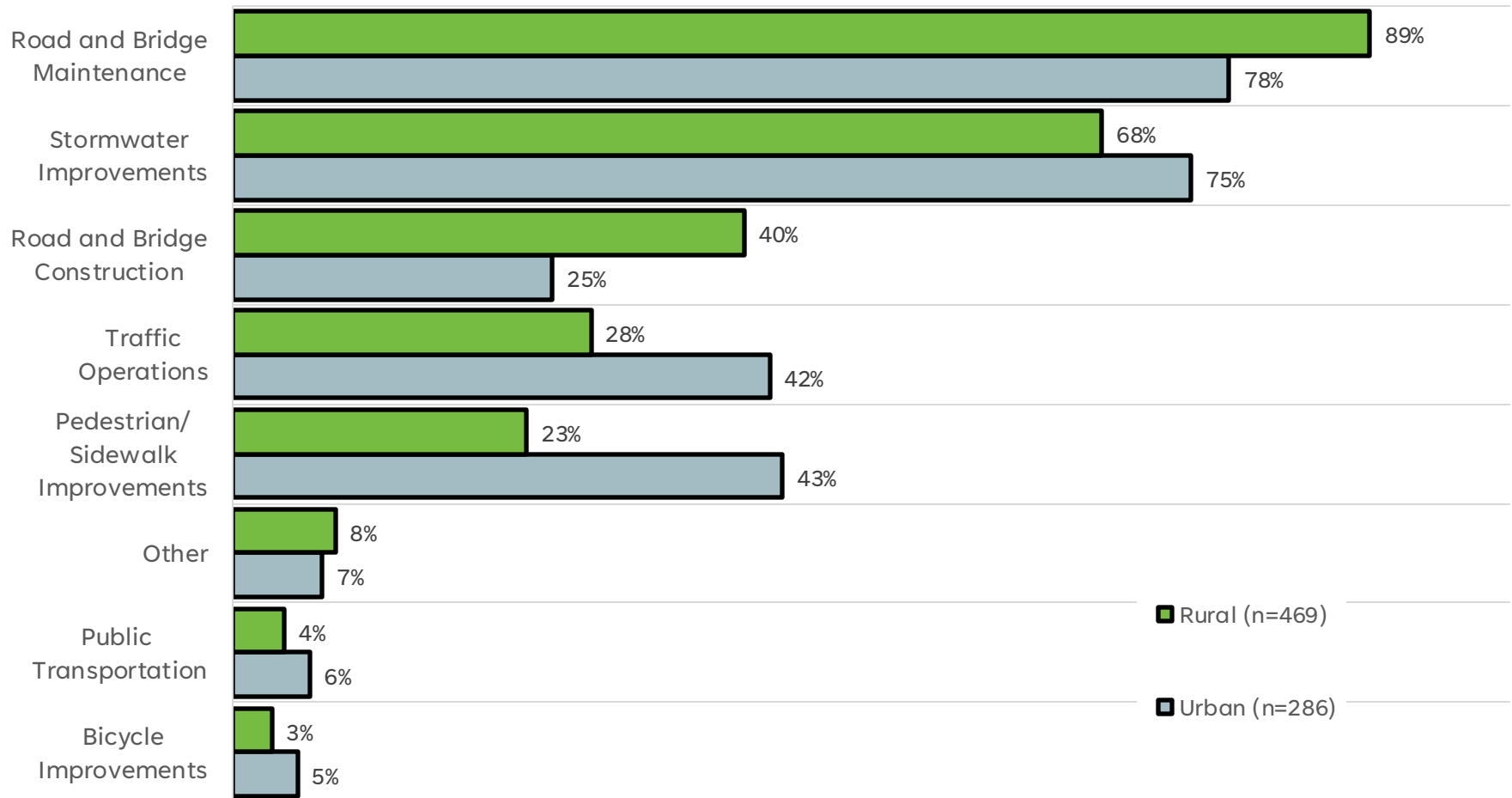
Transportation Grants: Measuring Rural and Urban Municipal Capacity

A 2023 survey of Pennsylvania municipalities found that rural municipalities are at a disadvantage when it comes to competing for state and federal transportation grants.

Co-sponsored by the Transportation Advisory Commission and the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, the survey of 758 municipal officials found that:



Top Three Rural and Urban Municipal Transportation Funding Needs



Sources of Rural and Urban Municipal Funding for Transportation Projects

	Rural (n=443)	Urban (n=275)
Liquid Fuels Allocation	96%	89%
Local Tax/Fees Revenue	56%	76%
Act 13 (Marcellus Shale Funds)	34%	7%
State Road Turnback Allocation	31%	20%
Other Federal or State Non-Transportation Funding	17%	26%
Competitive Transportation Grants	14%	28%
Other Sources*	5%	5%

*Other includes LERTA/Tax Increment Financing (TIF), Transportation Impact Fees, and County Local Use Fund (\$5 vehicle registration fee). Totals do not add up to 100 percent due to multiple data sources.

Factors Limiting or Preventing Rural and Urban Municipalities from Applying for Federal and State Transportation Grants

	Rural (n=443)	Urban (n=275)
Inability to fund the local match	62%	48%
Limited staff capacity/expertise to complete applications	60%	56%
Other local priorities	43%	41%
Did not know about funding opportunity	41%	41%
Limited technical/technological capacity and/or experience to complete application	23%	15%
Timing or deadline constraints	20%	24%
Limited staff capacity/expertise to manage funding awards	17%	25%
Project too costly	12%	15%
Project was not ready	8%	20%
Other reasons	8%	12%
Do not need transportation grant funding	4%	5%
Legal barriers	2%	3%

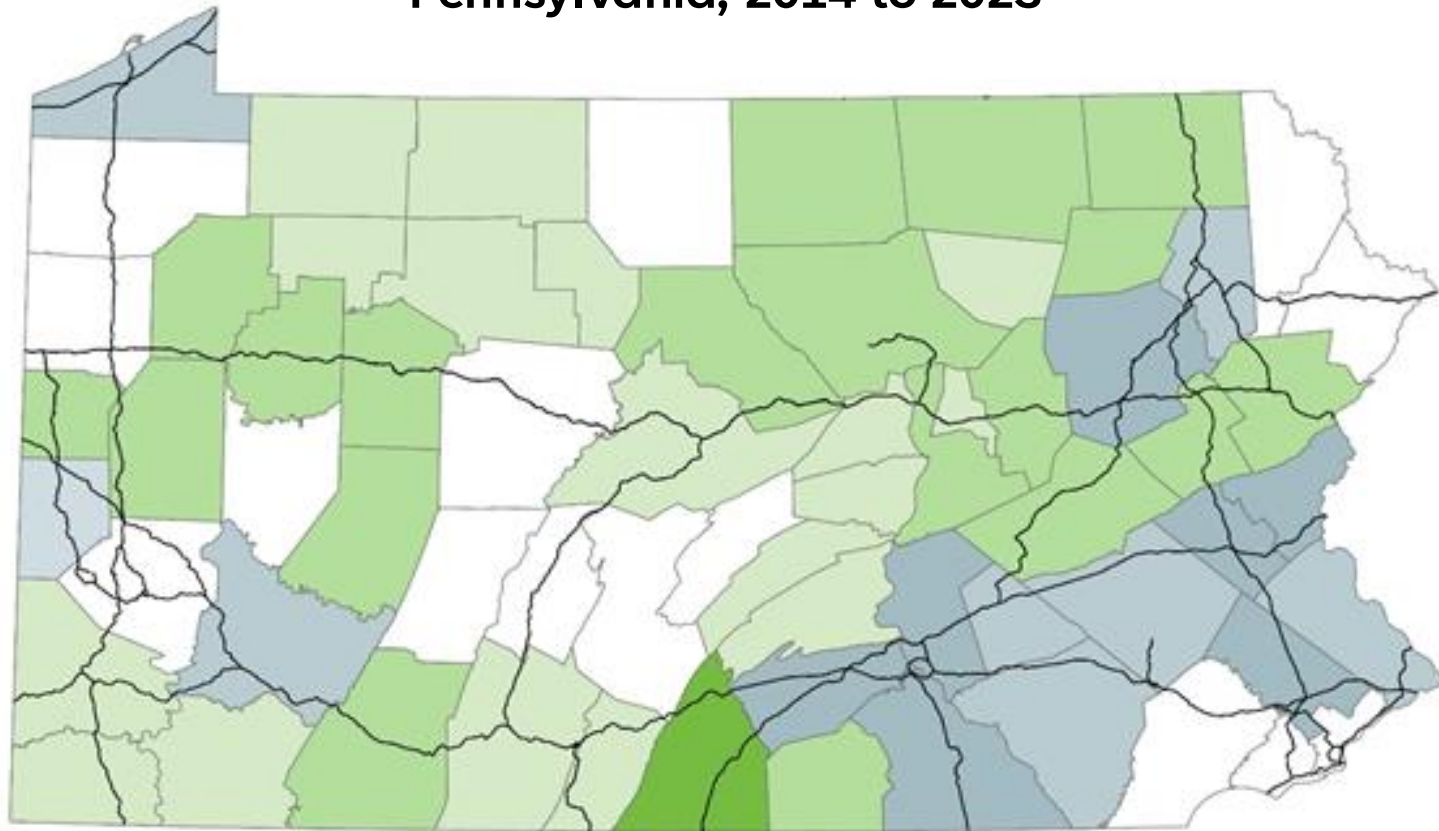
Totals do not add up to 100 percent due to multiple responses.

Analyzing the Impact of Warehouse Development in Pennsylvania

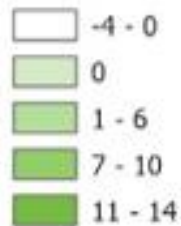
By: Moira Conway, Rebekah Hawk, Katherine Lovelidge, Owen Smith, Sophia Harris, Kutztown University; Alison Conway, Independent Consultant.

- Between 2014 and 2023, the total number of General Warehouse establishments in Pennsylvania increased by **35 percent**, from 693 to 939. This growth occurred in both urban and rural counties, with the highest growth rates observed mostly in Eastern and Central Pennsylvania along the I-78, I-80, and I-81 corridors.
- Long-distance truckload trucking has seen slight growth in rural counties while declining noticeably in urban counties.
- Statewide, there are no clearly observable trends regarding overall growth or decline in commercial vehicles (CV) involved in collisions in either urban or rural counties
- While rates of collisions involving CVs on state roads have generally remained steady, there is evidence of an increasing number of CVs involved in collisions on local roads.
- In both rural and urban counties, and on both state and local roads, the share of collisions involving tractor/semi-trailers has steadily declined, while the share involving single-unit trucks has steadily increased.

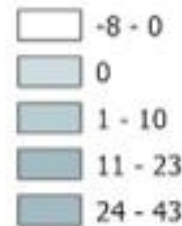
Net Change in General Warehousing and Storage Establishments in Pennsylvania, 2014 to 2023



Rural



Urban



— Interstate Highways

Thank You

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Introduction

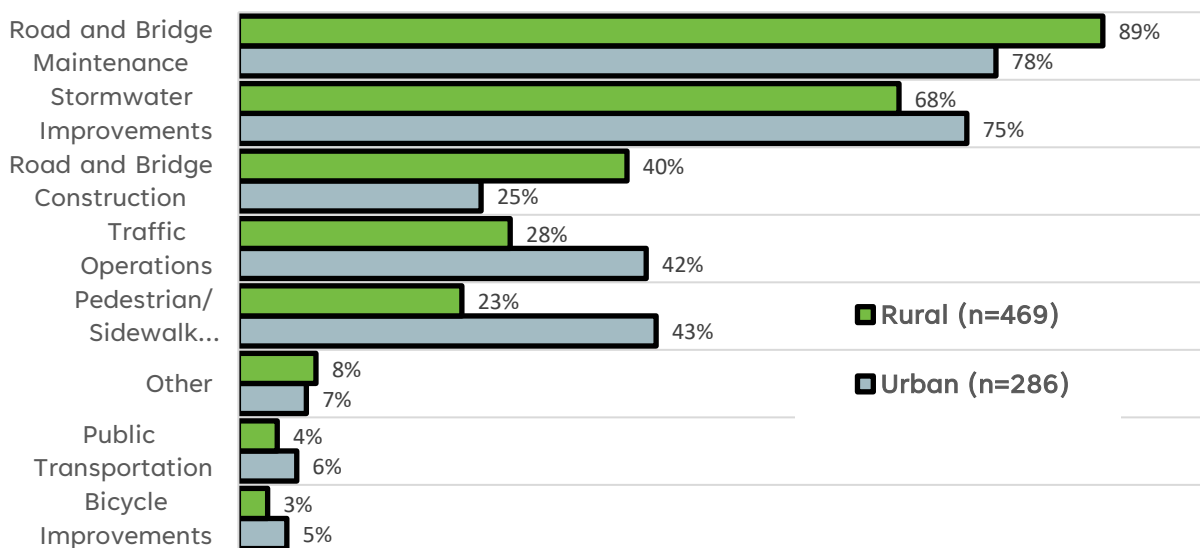
A recent survey of Pennsylvania municipalities found that rural municipalities are at a disadvantage when it comes to competing for state and federal transportation grants. Co-sponsored by the Transportation Advisory Committee and the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, the survey of 758 municipal officials found that: 1) rural municipalities are less likely to apply for transportation grants than urban municipalities, and 2) rural officials have more of a challenge in providing a local match for transportation grants than urban officials.

A majority of both rural and urban municipal officials said they need technical assistance in applying for transportation grants. The top two transportation funding needs of rural and urban municipalities are identical: road and bridge maintenance and stormwater improvement.

Transportation Funding Needs

More than 65 percent of rural and urban respondents identified the two needs, road and bridge maintenance and stormwater improvement, in their top three. Although, there was a difference for the top third need: rural officials identified road and bridge construction, while urban officials identified pedestrian/sidewalk improvements.

Figure 1: Top Three Rural and Urban Municipal Transportation Funding Needs



How Municipalities Fund Transportation Projects

Funding for municipal transportation projects can come from multiple sources. According to the survey results, both rural and urban municipalities used fewer than three funding sources for their last transportation project. Both rural and urban officials said their top two funding sources were Liquid Fuels allocation and municipal taxes and fees. Liquid Fuels are annual funding allocations

to municipalities from PennDOT based on population and miles of roads. The funds come from the state's oil franchise tax (commonly known as the gas tax). Municipal taxes and fees include revenues and municipalities raise from local sources. Together, these two sources were used to pay for 54 percent of rural and 86 percent of urban transportation projects.

It should be noted that rural municipalities are less likely to receive competitive grant funding than urban municipalities. One of the indicators of whether a municipality received competitive grant funding is the number of full-time employees. Rural municipalities that use competitive grant funding have an average of 14.6 full-time employees, while those who do not, have an average of 3.5 full-time employees. There is a similar pattern among urban municipalities.

Figure 2: Sources of Rural and Urban Municipal Funding for Transportation Projects

	Rural (n=443)	Urban (n=275)
Liquid Fuels Allocation	96%	89%
Local Tax/Fees Revenue	56%	76%
Act 13 (Marcellus Shale Funds)	34%	7%
State Road Turnback Allocation	31%	20%
Other Federal or State Non-Transportation Funding	17%	26%
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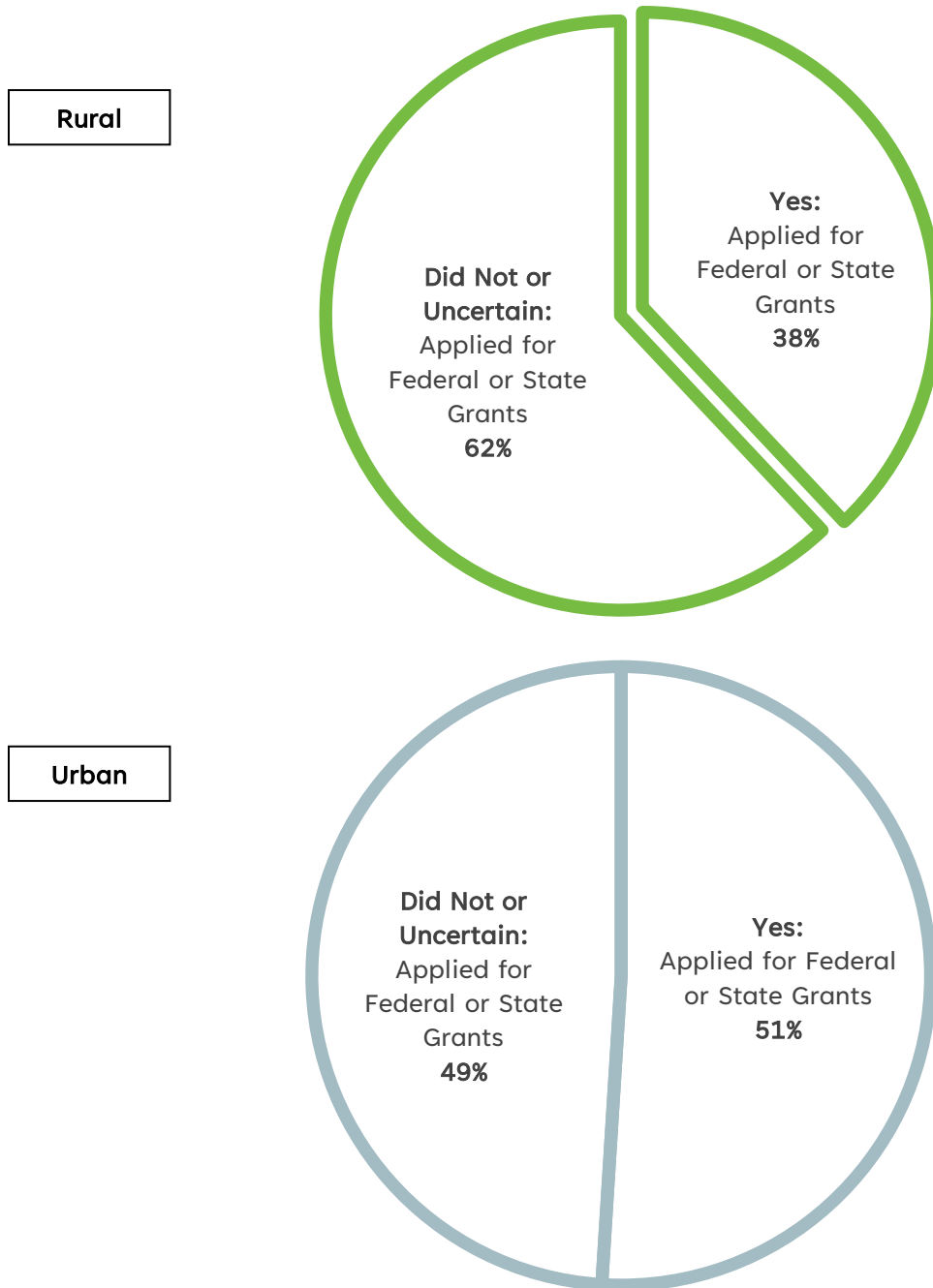
Other includes LERTA/Tax Increment Financing (TIF), Transportation Impact Fees, and County Local Use Fund (\$5 vehicle registration fee). Totals do not add up to 100 percent due to multiple data sources.

Applying for Federal or State Transportation Grants

Additionally, 38 percent of rural and 51 percent of urban respondents said their municipality had recently applied for federal or state transportation grants. Most rural respondents (62 percent) said that they did not apply or were unsure. Among urban respondents, 49 percent said that they did not apply or were unsure.

A key indicator on whether a municipality *applied* for a federal or state transportation grant was the number of full-time employees. Rural municipalities that applied for grants had an average of 8.1 full-time employees. Rural municipalities that did not apply or were unsure, had an average of 2.5 full-time employees. There was a similar pattern among urban municipalities: those who applied had an average of 29.6 full-time employees, while those who did not or were unsure had 10.8 full-time employees.

Figure 3: Rural and Urban Municipalities Who Recently Applied for Federal or State Grants



Factors Limiting or Preventing Municipalities from Applying for Federal and State Transportation Grants

According to survey results, the top two reasons that limit or prevent rural and urban municipalities from applying for federal and state transportation grants are: inability to fund the local match and limited staff capacity/expertise to complete applications.

Another factor identified by both rural and urban municipal officials was not knowing about the funding opportunities. Furthermore, 41 percent of rural officials and the same percentage of urban officials indicated that they did not know about funding opportunities.

Figure 4: Factors Limiting or Preventing Rural and Urban Municipalities from Applying for Federal and State Transportation Grants

	Rural (n=443)	Urban (n=275)
Inability to fund the local match	62%	48%
Limited staff capacity/expertise to complete applications	60%	56%
Other local priorities	43%	41%
Did not know about funding opportunity	41%	41%
Limited technical/technological capacity and/or experience to complete application	23%	15%
Timing or deadline constraints	20%	24%
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Project too costly	12%	15%
Project was not ready	8%	20%
Other reasons	8%	12%
Do not need transportation grant funding	4%	5%
Legal barriers	2%	3%

Totals do not add up to 100 percent due to multiple responses.

Federal and State Transportation Grants Applied for Over the Past Five Years

The top two programs rural and urban municipalities applied for within the past five years were: 1) PennDOT Multimodal Transportation Fund (MTF), which provides financial assistance to municipalities and others to improve transportation assets that enhance communities, pedestrian safety, and transit revitalization, and 2) Commonwealth Financing Authority Multimodal Transportation Fund, which provides funds for municipalities and others to be used for the development, rehabilitation and enhancement of transportation assets to existing communities, streetscape, lighting, sidewalk enhancement, pedestrian safety, connectivity of transportation assets and transit-oriented development.

Both programs require a local funding match. Over 50 percent of rural municipalities and about 35 percent of urban municipalities said that they had problems providing a local match.

For the programs listed in Figure 5, rural municipalities applied for an average of 1.7 programs. Urban municipalities applied for an average of 2.4 programs.

Figure 5: Federal and State Transportation Grants Rural and Urban Municipalities Applied for in the Past Five Years

	Rural (n=166)	Urban (n=140)
PennDOT Multimodal Transportation Fund	51%	68%
Commonwealth Financing Authority (CFA) Multimodal Transportation Fund	27%	49%
Green Light Go	19%	48%
Automated Red-Light Enforcement	19%	38%
Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program (TASA)	8%	17%
County Local Use Fund (\$5 vehicle registration fee)	7%	7%
Discretionary (competitive) Federal Transportation Grants (e.g., ARC Local Access, Road Program, BIL/IIJA Grants)	8%	5%
Other	28%	12%

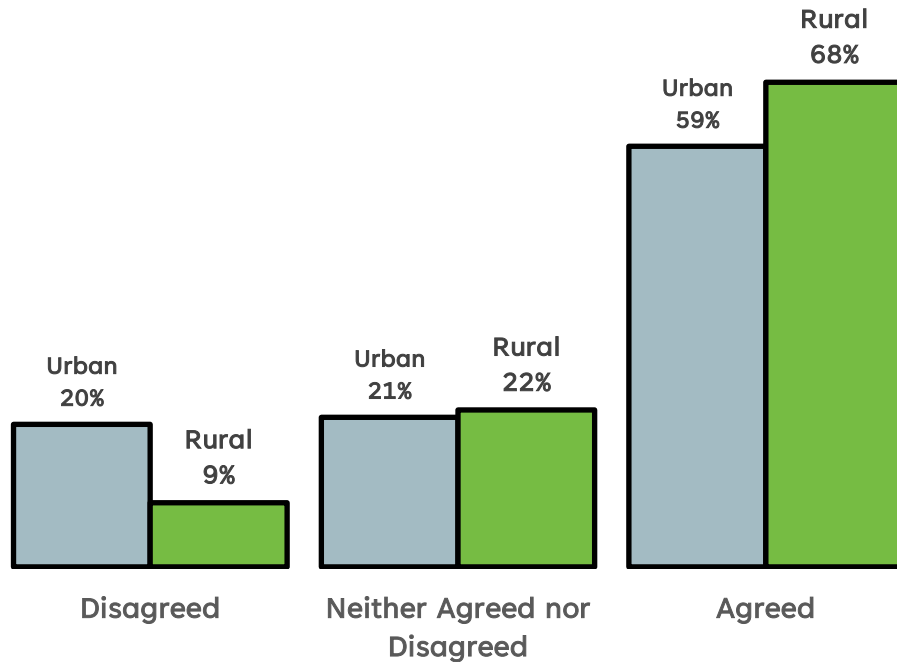
Other includes Dirt and Gravel Road Program, Community Development Block Grant Funds, Local Share Account (Gaming Funds) and other programs. Totals do not add up to 100 percent due to multiple responses.

Need for Technical Assistance and Challenges in Providing Local Match

The survey had two attitudinal questions. The first asked if the respondent's municipality had challenges in providing local match for transportation grants. The second asked the municipalities if they needed technical assistance in applying for transportation grants. For both questions, respondents could rate their level of agreement or disagreement.

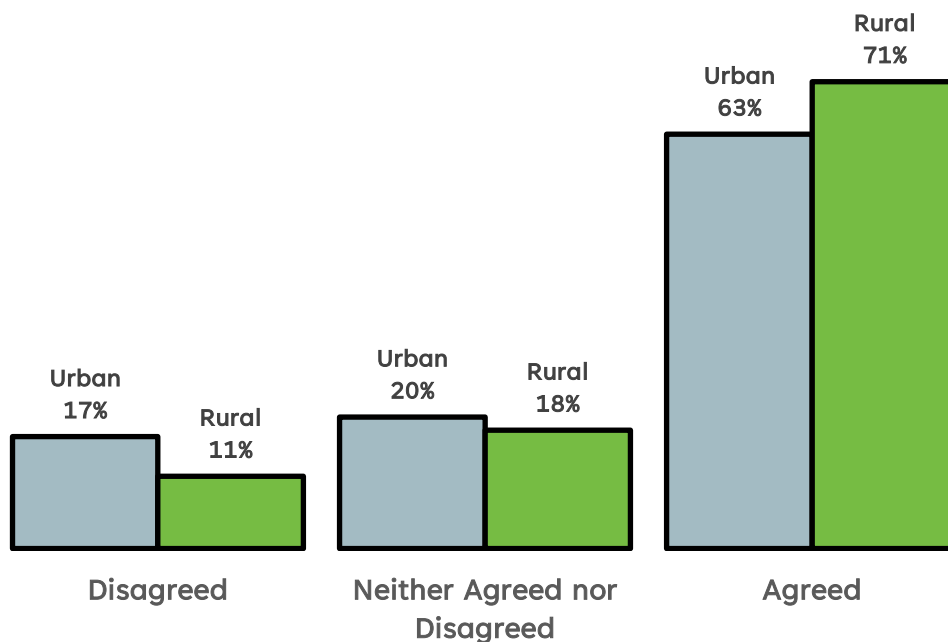
For the first question, 68 percent of rural respondents and 59 percent of urban respondents agreed or strongly agreed that providing the local match was a challenge. For the second question, 71 percent of rural and 63 percent of urban respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they needed technical assistance.

Figure 6: Rural and Urban Officials Who Agreed/Disagreed with the Statement: “My Municipality Has Challenges in Providing Local Match for Transportation Grants”



The two questions were then cross tabulated together: 59 percent of rural officials agreed or strongly agreed that they need both technical assistance and that meeting the local match was a challenge. Among urban officials: 45 percent officials agreed or strongly agreed that they need both technical assistance and that meeting the local match was a challenge.

Figure 7: Rural and Urban Officials Who Agreed/Disagreed with the Statement: “My Municipality Needs Technical Assistance in Applying for Transportation Grants”



Conclusions

Results of this survey suggest that there is a sizable number of rural and urban municipalities that have difficulty accessing federal and state transportation grants. These difficulties or challenges seem to fall into three broad categories:

- Not knowing about the grant programs.
- Difficulty filling out the grant application.
- Difficulties meeting the local financial match requirement.

One factor that was common to all municipalities with these challenges was municipal staffing. Municipalities (rural and urban) with fewer than four full-time staff had more challenges than those municipalities with more staff. Statewide, 51 percent of the state's 2,560 municipalities have fewer than 4 employees.

Hiring more municipal staff is not a financial option for most municipalities. Therefore, better methods of assisting municipalities may need to be explored.

Methods

At the request of the Pennsylvania Transportation Advisory Committee, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania conducted a joint survey with two objectives: 1) understand the ability of Pennsylvania's municipalities to apply for state and federal transportation grants, and 2) measure the ability of municipalities to meet the local funding match requirements.

The survey was electronically sent to the lead contact in 2,537 municipalities: 23 municipalities were purposely excluded from the survey. These municipalities were part of a separate study. The survey was conducted in July 2023.

In total, 758 surveys were returned, making the response rate 30 percent. The margin of error is +/- 3.1 percent. Except for Philadelphia County, responses were received from every Pennsylvania county.

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania analyzed the results from a rural/urban perspective. For this study, rural municipalities were defined as those located in a rural county. Similarly, urban municipalities are those located in an urban county. A rural county has a population density below the statewide rate of fewer than 291 persons per square mile. Urban counties have a population density at or above the statewide rate.

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